10: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1945 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

141 [146] Young people of both sexes are attractive and robust but hard work, undernourishment and, in the case of the women, constant child-bearing often make them appear old when they have only reached what should be the prime of life.

591 428 596 Family life among the Karens is not unlike that of the ordinary European family. They do not have the patriarchial family system of the Chinese, and each married couple usually has its own house in which to live. Often the woman brings her young husband to live with her parents and he inherits their lands on their decease. Marriage in the early days was strictly within the tribe. 582 163 165 Even marriage with those of other Karen tribes was looked down upon. Karen women usually bear as many as ten or more children, but often raise less than half of them, 858 due to their lack of knowledge of sanitation. Karen 888 fathers are usually fond of their children and take as good care of them as they know how. Their love is generally sentimental and children are allowed to rule the household. Old people usually receive good care for the Karens always reverence age.

IV

OCCUPATIONS

243 433 In the early days the Karens were concerned with wresting a living for themselves from the ground where they lived. Almost without exception they were cultivators of the soil and raised rice, their principal food. They followed the two methods usually found in Burma, the mountain method in the hills and the paddy-field method on the plains.

243 In the hills the wasteful way of cultivating rice was that of clearing a section, called in Burmese a *taung-ya*,

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

CHAPTER XIV

SOCIAL CONDITIONS

Political Arrangements

The Karen race does not possess what may be termed social solidarity. It is broken up into many tribes, some of which differ considerably from others, as, for instance, the Brecs of Karenni and the Sgaw Karen of Lower Burma. There is, however, enough similarity of dialects and traditions, as well as of religion and customs, to make it certain that they really belong together and are descended from a common ancestry. Even the individual tribes do not consist of compact groups of clans. To be sure, there is more cohesion among the members of one tribe than among those of different tribes; but the village rather than the tribe has the greater claim upon their adherence. In the days before the British conquest and annexation of Burma [1]—when the country received a stable government that put an end to feuds and petty warfare—the village was the political unit. In the village the houses were ranged side by side, or else, as in the Pegu Hills, all the families of the little community lived within what may be called the village-house, each family having its living-room opening off of the common corridor. Everybody was thrown into intimate contact with everybody else in the village. Politically and socially the village was the center of their common life. The family group, the natural unit of kinship, although not always confined to the village, was economically and politically subordinate to it.

In the village the elders ("phga tha phga," literally, the old men) were looked up to as connecting the village life with the past,

[1] The British conquest of Burma was accomplished in three wars, each of which was brought on by the arrogance and stupidity of the Burmese kings and their high-handed dealings with British subjects. The First Burmese War (1824-26) resulted in the ceding of the provinces of Tenasserim and Arakan to the British, in the former of which there was a considerable Karen population. The Second Burmese War (1852-53) ended with the annexation of the country of Pegu or Lower Burma, in which dwell the great body of the Karen people in Burma; and the remainder of the territory ruled by the despotic Burmese kings came to enjoy the privileges of the Indian Empire after a single short campaign of only two months' duration in 1885, known as the Third Burmese War. Soon after this an orderly government was established throughout what is now known as the province of Burma: Sir J. G. Scott, *Burma, A Handbook*, 196-206.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

588 in which all wisdom and culture were supposed to have been revealed. The older the man, provided he had not begun to show too evident signs of decay, the wiser and more worthy of reverence he was thought to be. These old men repeated to the younger generation the "sayings of the elders" that had descended to them from former

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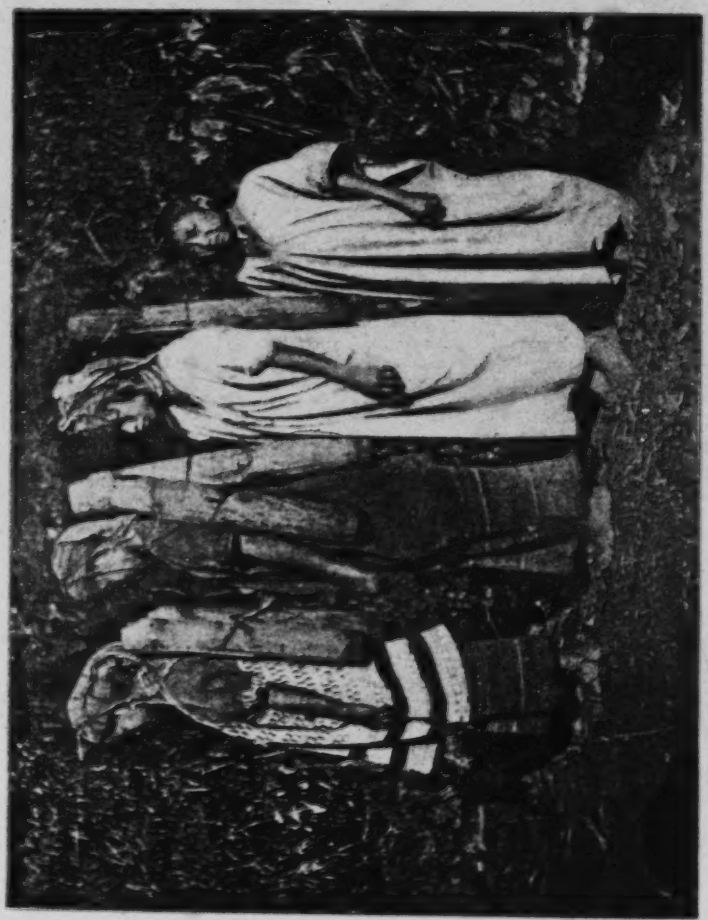

BRINGING WATER FOR THE VISITOR, NABAAIN VILLAGE, THARRAWADDY DISTRICT

generations. They were consulted on all occasions, and their advice was usually followed.

622 Above the elders was the village chief ("th'kaw" or "s'kaw"). He was actually the chief man in the village. His position was

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

on a low table. The pile of rice on the tray looks like a heap of snow. The curries or condiments are placed beside the tray in small cups. The members of the family usually eat together. If there are guests the women often wait, either to serve in case the supply needs replenishing, or because they are shy about eating with strangers.

In addition to attending to their domestic cares, the women take their place beside the men in the fields. It should not be forgotten, however, that the latter can cook and perform the work usually assigned to women more readily than men in the West can. In the field the women and girls assist in the sowing, planting, and transplanting of rice on the plains, as well as in the reaping, threshing, etc., doing their full share along with the men. They tend the cotton and vegetables and carry the greater part of the paddy to the storage-bins and from these to their homes. The only work I have seen men doing that I have never observed being done by women is plowing.

The women mingle in the village gatherings and take part in the wedding and funeral festivities, their share in the latter being specially prominent.[2] Their position in their own families depends largely on their personal character. If they possess strong personalities, they gain considerable prestige and exercise influence accordingly. The older they grow the more conservative they become, and not infrequently the opinions of a grandmother will keep a whole family from bettering its condition by engaging in some new occupation. The Karen grandmother holds the first place in the family at the "Bgha" feast, when all of the members are gathered together. She is then the "Bgha a' hko." This peculiar position of hers has been discussed in the chapter on Feasts to the "Bgha."[3] Its religious significance is remarkable and may be a relic of matriarchal government, which is still found in Tibet. But it does not appear to have any effect on the social position of the sex, except in so far as it prevents the younger members of the family, both men and women, from breaking with the religious and social traditions of their forefathers.

In the olden days three classes of people were condemned "to live without the camp." These were cohabiting couples who had not complied with the marriage rites, widows, and orphans. A couple whose union had been formed without the performance and

[2] See Chapter XX, p. 262.
[3] See Chapter XXIV, pp. 248, 249.